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ABSTRACT

This document discusses the following critical issues in community college education: (1) computers and technology, (2) faculty retirements and the boomlets, (3) adjunct teachers, and (4) societal problems, including people being left behind. A digital divide has arisen in America and a national agenda is needed that will fully train all adults in 5 years so that they can be comfortable with technology and continue to grow on their own with the Internet. There will be an increase in our higher education population (boomlets) over the next ten years at the very time that a vast number of teachers will be retiring. Therefore, we must seek to encourage and train the next generation of community college teachers and administrators quickly. The overuse of adjunct faculty debilitates colleges and shortchange students in their education, and asserts that the government must address this practice before the coming tidal wave of students and retiring faculty. Financial and educational deprivation is an equal opportunity oppressor, and community colleges can play a major role in the process of educating the poor in a less expensive mode. (VWC)

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CRITICAL ISSUES ---
AND THEREFORE OPPORTUNITIES ---
FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Presentation to Congressman Major R. Owens, Congresswoman Carrie P. Meek, and to the CONGRESSIONAL PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS and the PROGRESSIVE CHALLENGE.

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CRITICAL ISSUES ---
AND THEREFORE OPPORTUNITIES ---
FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Introduction

The United States can be proud of its many academic achievements. Prior to this century college bound students flocked to Europe -- if they could afford it. That has now changed and highly qualified students from throughout the world wish to come to the United States to study in our colleges and universities.

Many even come to what some scholars have called America's greatest contribution to higher education: our Community Colleges. Miami, Los Angeles and New York Community Colleges, to name a few have long educated a high number of foreign born students.

There are some 1400 community colleges nationwide. They are community oriented and have traditionally served those students not very well served by other segments of higher education.

The veteran, the late bloomer, the person who has not quite found themselves, those with limited academic training, the recently divorced person trying to start a new life, those with limited finances, those preparing for a second career, those who are too young to go away to college, those who can never go away to college are but a few of the persons served by the nation's community colleges.

There is also a large cadre of people who merely wish to take a course or two, to upgrade their skills -- for instance to take a few computer courses. Others attend cultural or non-credit courses. They do not seek an academic degree -- many of them are already college graduates. Throughout the country they have found community colleges receptive and responsive to their particular needs.

America's community colleges although they have been around since the earliest years of this century, really received their greatest boost from a man who never attended college yet became President of the United States: Harry S. Truman. His desire to make higher education available to all brought about the Truman Commission in 1947 that proved such a boon for the hundreds of thousands of World War Two

Veterans. For many it was the first time anybody in their family had gone to college.

The pace intensified during the fifties and sixties when hundreds of new community colleges were established. At one time hundreds of community colleges were opening every year.

As we prepare for the next century, the nations has millions of Community College graduates. Many continued their formal education at other institutions. But many others were just as well served with the few courses they pursued.

Community Colleges are not merely Junior Colleges. They do not exist only to provide the first two years of the baccalaureate program. Most do perform that task and they do it well. Historically their graduates have been as successful as those who began their studies at four year institutions. And in many cases, research shows that these transfers have been more successful in earning high grades and in graduating than those who started as Freshmen at four year institutions.

So much for background.

Let's look ahead.

We have been asked to identify some critical issues in Community College Education as we see them from our vantage point. We will.

But since I, Gustavo Mellander, am making the oral presentation today I have been asked to introduce myself.

But let me first introduce my wife, Nelly. She is a former dean of students and worked as a counselor at Mercer Community College and Essex Community College both in New Jersey. She also was a counselor at Rutgers university and later at San Jose State University in California. Presently she teaches Spanish at George Mason University in Virginia. I thank her for her research assistance in preparing this paper.

Back to me. I graduated from high school when I was 15. I went off to college -- and within nine weeks found myself totally lost and in danger of being suspended. Luckily I was able to withdraw. I went to work in a machine factory. I quickly noticed that the best jobs, those with "starched white collars," were held by college graduates. But I had failed at that venture -- so I kept working in a dusty, rusty, noisy and hot machine shop.

A few years went by and I finally got the courage to walk through the local community college. I walked through the hallways, went to the library, and so on. I began to go to the library in the evenings and read the magazines and newspapers. Later I read the class schedules. It took another year before I summoned the nerve to take an evening course. It was Business Law. I did well. I then took two courses. Did well.

I finally got the nerve to quit my full time job, get a part time job and go to college full time. In two years I graduated and transferred to George Washington University, here in Washington, D. C.

Thanks to the excellent education I received at my Community College, I was off and running. In the fullness of time and after a slew of part-time jobs including many here on the Hill, I received my Ph. D. in History from George Washington. I worked at several universities where I taught, became a department chair, an academic dean, and an interim chancellor.

In 1975 I became president of a small Community College in New Jersey: Passaic County Community College. I was there for ten years, then returned to my native California as a Community College President but quickly became the Chancellor of a large 35,000 student, two college Community College District.

With the passage of time, I decided I wanted to help train the next generation of Community College teachers and administrators. So in 1992, I came to George Mason University in Fairfax to be the Director of the National Center for Community College Education and to direct its doctoral program.

Focused on my goal at last or so I thought. But within weeks of arriving, I was drafted to be the Dean of the Graduate School of Education. I begged off being a candidate three times but ultimately the president and the provost prevailed. I agreed to be a candidate

since the graduate school had some morale, administration and accreditation problems. Since I had successfully addressed similar problems at other institutions, I finally agreed. But I noticed them that I would not serve more than five years.

So I left the deanship two years ago, in 1997, to devote myself full-time to being the Director of the National Center of the Community College Education. Aside from working with our doctoral students, I am busy on Community College research. I also write a column every two weeks for the Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education.

What about the future?

As a university professor, as a professor at a Graduate School, as one involved in research in this wonderful fact-oriented city and with the aid of the Internet -- you know I have a lot of material. I could talk for hours on end. But I won't

LET US LIST FOUR ISSUES.

1. Computers -- and Technology in general.

2. Faculty Retirements and the Boomlets.

3. Adjuncts -- or what we used to call Part Time teachers.

4. Societal problems -- people being left behind.

1. COMPUTERS AND TECHNOLOGY IN GENERAL.

I am reminded of the 1960s Dusty Hoffman movie, "The Graduate." Remember that movie? Everybody over the age of thirty was a fool and dysfunctional, remember? At a party shortly after Hoffman graduated from college, one of his father's business friends corralled Hoffman and said, "Plastics, Plastics!" Remember?

Well, I find myself falling into the same trap. Where ever I go I find myself mumbling "Computers, Computers" to anyone who will listen. Computers! If you want to be in the game, you best be proficient. That's a given.

Community Colleges will play an important role in helping millions achieve that competency. Many will study its intricacies to become earnest professionals. Many others will merely want to be able to "use technology." They will just take as many courses as they have to achieve that goal. Some will come as full time students-- many more, even some college graduates, will come as part time students to learn the skill, the magic and the promise of computers.

Digital Divide

A few years ago when we were just beginning to understand the glory and the promise of computers, it was believed and heralded as the beginning of a new age. A new age that would fight discrimination, and would ameliorate the power and influence of wealth. Computers the Internet and technology in general would in short give the country a level playing field.

All persons regardless of wealth, ethnic background and other characteristics would benefit equally.

Well, that hasn't happened. The white middle class and those who are even more privileged have indeed logged on. They are benefiting from the revolution because they know how to access it, how to log on, how to manipulate and use that vast system.

But the poor, be they rural or inner city residents, have been left out. A large number of Americans have not been trained and thus can not participate in our computer revolution. Who are they? Most of them are low income people -- African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos and Caucasians. Income has affected access and lack of access has created new problems, new discrimination.

Somebody has dubbed this reality the Digital Divide. Those who can not access the Internet, utilize technology, etc. are being left behind. Computers and the use of technology is not eliminating differences -

- it is creating new ones. And at an alarming speed. So we are not solving old problems. We have actually created new ones. A divide, a digital divide has developed in our country.

Can that problem be corrected?

Yes, absolutely. It is doable. It's just a matter of introduction, of training, of education. Millions of privileged persons have learned. Millions of others can learn as well. We need a focused education agenda to eliminate the digital divide.

I submit no institution is our society is better prepared or can gear up more quickly and more effectively to address this issue than the nation's Community Colleges.

High schools can't. They have their own training needs. And once they fully address this particular issue we might see the problem begin to disappear. Until then community colleges can help our high schools by training their teachers and their graduates.

Four year colleges and universities certainly can't address this enormous digital divide issue. That's not their traditional mission. They normally work with those students, regular enrolled students, already "at least comfortable" with technology. We are seeking to help those below the digital divide.

We speak mainly of adults. Some have finished high school but still are not plugged in. What of working adults, regardless of their age, or education who would benefit from becoming computer literate? Community colleges know how to work with that population. They were created long ago to provide the necessary supportive educational climate. They have the "hands on" experience of teaching adults, of developing short term classes, of achieving success.

We suggest a national agenda. Let's create a program with say a five year horizon, to fully train all adults. Train them to be comfortable with technology so they can continue to grow on their own, train them to be able to effectively use the Internet. Those are the simple, easy and achievable goals. The program can be part and parcel of Vice President Gore's technology initiative.

Let's determine to train all Americans to be comfortable with technology so they can continue to grow on their own. Train them to be able to effectively use the Internet. Those are simple, easy and achievable goals.

What would have to de done? Teachers have tc be trained. Hardware and software have to be purchased. Tuition has to be subsidized. Let's start with three community colleges in each state in Year One. Select and train the faculty, bring in the first students. Classes should be offered in the daytime, evenings and on the week ends. Schedules to be molded to fit the needs of adults. Open

laboratories should be available seven days a week so students can practice and gain knowledge and confidence.

It can be a great pilot program. Results will be seen quickly and we can begin to eliminate the Digital Divide.

2. FACULTY RETIREMENTS AND BOOMLETS

A few years ago Secretary of Education Richard Riley announced that America will need 2 million new teachers within the next ten years. Some have questioned his number but all agree that there will indeed be the need for a great many new teachers.

Riley was referring to Kindergarten to 12th grade teachers. We face a similar problem in the Community College field. It is estimated from existing demographic records that from 50 to 60 per cent of all community college professionals, teachers and administrators, who are working today will not be working ten years from now. The vast majority will have retired. The are in that age cohort. Some states, such as California with its 107 community colleges and its targeted age 60 retirement age, will be impacted far more than others.

Boomlets

It gets worse. Another bomb is ticking away.

The boomers as a group married late and held off having children. Some of the men who married early, divorced, remarried and then started a second family. The result has been an increase in the nation's birth rate which began around ten years ago. It has yet to abate.

Those children, dubbed the Boomlet, are in our school systems. They have impacted our elementary schools nationwide. Many arrived in our ninth grades this year. They will be hitting our colleges in four years. The numbers will continue at a high level for well into the next century.

The result is that there will be an increase in our higher education population at the very time that vast number of teachers will be retiring. Thus it is clear that not only will Community Colleges have to replace their retiring teachers but that more will be needed to accommodate the incoming tidal wave of Boomlets.

In short we face a double whammy. A large scale retirement of teachers and a tidal wave of students will hit us at the same time.

What to do?

Clearly we have to train the next generation of Community College teachers and administrators. And we better do so quickly. Unfortunately virtually nothing is being done to address the coming shortage of teachers and administrators.. A few universities nationwide have a small number of programs, but they have been in existence for many years and were not created to address the coming shortages.

George Mason University in collaboration with the Virginia Community College System did create a doctoral program to address the issue directly. The program has two populations in mind. Existing working community college professionals who want to upgrade their knowledge and expertise and those not presently at a Community College who wish to be part of the next generation. of professionals.

Normally, for those who wish to teach a Masters degree is the entry level requirement. Yet more and more Community Colleges are seeking those with doctorates. Promotions and even tenure at some institutions are enhanced if you have a doctorate.

Many states require that a person have a doctorate if they wish to move up the administrative ladder. Most deans and presidents nationwide need to have an earned doctorate.

How can we encourage more persons to seek careers in our community colleges? Congress may want to consider supporting graduate education programs for those who want to work in community colleges. Fellowships could be established. And loan programs could be created wherein the loan would be forgiven over a five year period if the person did indeed go to work at a Community College.

3. ADJUNCTS.

Adjuncts are what we used to call part-time teachers. There was a time when a college would get into serious trouble with the State Department of Education and the regional accrediting association if some 10% of their classes were taught by part-time teachers. It was frowned upon and discouraged. But that has all changed now.

Today most Community Colleges have over 50% of their classes taught by adjuncts. Some Community Colleges according to a report written by the respected Chronicle of Higher Education shows that some have up to 75% of all their courses taught by adjuncts. That is far too many.

This should not be taken as a criticism of adjuncts. Most are very good and they can bring a vitality and real world reality to many of their classes. For instance when I was chancellor of a community college district in Silicon Valley we were delighted to have working computer professions teach as adjuncts at our two colleges. They brought currency, a real world reality and even job opportunities to our students.

Some fields lend themselves to the hiring of "hands on" professionals. But that is not what is happening nationwide. The new trend goes beyond that. Thousands of English, history and language courses, to name a few, are being taught by an inordinate number of adjuncts.

How has this come to pass? It has always been cheaper, less expensive to hire part timers in all fields. Adjuncts are paid a lot less than full time teachers. Further an institution does not have to make a commitment, doesn't have to pay fringe benefits which usually approach 25% of one's salary, and in general the practice provides an institution a lot of flexibility.

So colleges and other institutions have long hired part-time employees. But the practice grew with a vengeance in the late 80s and 90s during those difficult budgetary days. Budgets were cut but colleges were expected to accept even more students. Thus when a full-time vacancy occurred it was cheaper and expedient to hire adjuncts to teach instead of hiring a full-timer. It has become a habit at some colleges. And with accrediting agencies and state departments of education looking the other way, the practice has grown and continues unchallenged.

What to do?

The issue has to be addressed. It debilitates colleges. Students are shortchanged since adjuncts normally do not have office hours or counsel students, etc. Unless the practice is reversed soon, the coming tidal wave of students and the many faculty retirements will facilitate the practice being continued. Perhaps Congress should to ask questions since neither the local departments of education or accrediting agencies seem too inclined to challenge the existing

practice. Perhaps the federal Department of Education should collect relevant data and publish it. Spotlighting issues is helpful.

4. SOCIETAL PROBLEMS – PEOPLE BEING LEFT BEHIND

We live in extraordinary economic times. We are told we face the happy prospect of an enormous national budgetary surplus. Many Americans are better off today than ever before. But in the face of America's great economic boom we still see large pockets of poverty and large levels of unemployment.

As President Clinton's recent trip has highlighted those pockets exist in urban areas and in rural areas and among all ethnic groups. Examples can be found in any large American city -- including here in Washington, DC

Financial and educational deprivation is an equal opportunity oppressor -- an oppressor of African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, Native Americans and Caucasians. All are negatively impacted. Equity with the rest of America is long over due.

It will take a lot of good will and progressive public policy to correct that horrible imbalance. Government and the private sector have to work hand in hand.

Education has to be a full partner as well. Let me suggest an Education Common market to help end poverty through training, through education. And there is no unit of America's higher

education better prepared by philosophy, by history than the local Community Colleges.

I urge Congress and other policy makers to make Community Colleges full partners of President Clinton's attempt to attack hard core poverty. That should be a national priority and Community Colleges are the experienced and logical educational partner.

In short, I suggest we invest part of the surplus in Community College education. Notice I said "invest" not "spend." For frankly expenditures in education are truly investments. Investments that, as has been proven time and time again, pay off handsomely for the individual and for the nation.

Two fundamental facts.

It costs less, and less by far, to educate students at Community Colleges than at other higher education institutions. We have a golden opportunity to curtail expenditures while educating millions more.

The Hope Scholarship program, Pell grants, TRIO and other programs have been proven to be good and effective. But hundreds of thousands of potential students are still not pursuing education beyond high school, not reaching their fullest potential.

I suggest Congress and the Community College community refocus on those who are falling by the wayside. How can we reach out to them? One way would be to identify those Colleges that have done a particularly good job with these government programs. Spotlight their successes and urge other to emulate them.

The answers are out there. They can be collected by the American Association of Community Colleges and by the Association of Community Colleges Trustees. Their respective presidents, David Pierce and Ray Taylor, would be glad I am sure, to cooperate.

I urge policy makers to study existing programs that have succeeded. Seek out their directors who will have suggestions on how they -- and the rest of the Community Colleges -- can be more effective.

California, I read, would be the world's sixth most productive and wealthiest country were it a separate nation. California also has the most comprehensive network of Community Colleges in the nation. Years ago they decided to build enough Community Colleges so that every single resident would be able to drive to a Community College from their homes. So today California has 107 Community Colleges.

Experts are quick to credit the influence of higher education in the miracle of exploding technology that we have seen over the past twenty-five years. There are no less that six Community Colleges

right smack in the middle of Silicon Valley and another half a dozen within fifty miles.

The nation might well want to study and emulate the early California higher education Master Plan. We might want to read again the recommendations of the 1947 Truman Commission. Have we met its goals? All of them? In short let's make Community College education more accessible to more Americans. It would invigorate those areas that have been left behind.

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The Mellander's teach at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. They are working on a book length manuscript tentatively entitled "Hispanics and Community Colleges." Their latest collaboration Charles Edward Magoon: The Panama Years will be published in Fall 1999. It covers the early years of U. S. canal building activity and its relations with the recently established Republic of Panama.